

Message Text

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44

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3874

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

DIA WASHDC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: M.R. SENI REAPPOINTED AS PRIME MINISTER

REF: BANGKOK 26750

SUMMARY: KING FORMALLY APPOINTS M.R. SENI PRAMOT AS NEW PRIME MINISTER ON SEPTEMBER 25. SPECIAL DEMOCRAT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO HAMMER OUT COMMON POLICY AND ALLOCATION OF MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS WITH PROSPECTIVE COALITION PARTNERS. TWO ANTI-THANOM ACTIVISTS MURDERED ON SEPTEMBER 24. END SUMMARY.

1. THE KING FORMALLY APPOINTED M.R. SENI PRAMOT AS THE NEW PRIME MINISTER ON SEPTEMBER 25. THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, UTHAI PHIMCHAICHON, SUBMITTED M.R. SENI PRAMOT'S NAME
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TO THE KING, AFTER THE LEADERS OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE, SOCIAL

NATIONALIST, THAI NATION AND THE DEMOCRAT PARTIES HAD SIGNED A PLEDGE TO FORM A NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF M.R. SENI.

2. BEFORE THE FORMAL APPOINTMENT, M.R. SENI SAID ON SEPTEMBER 25 THAT THE PRESENT CABINET WOULD BE RESHUFFLED AND SOME "OUTSIDERS" INCLUDED IN THE NEW CABINET. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE PARTY QUOTAS FOR THE MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS WOULD REMAIN THE SAME. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE CABINET WOULD BE NAMED AFTER THE PASSAGE OF THE BUDGET BILL, WHICH IS UP FOR ITS SECOND AND THIRD READINGS ON SEPT. 27.

3. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL, THE DEMOCRATS NAMED A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO HAMMER OUT A COMMON POLICY WITH THE THREE OTHER PROPOSED COALITION PARTNERS AND TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS. IN ADDITION TO THOSE MENTIONED IN REFTEL, SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN, ADVISOR TO THE PARTY LEADER, IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THIS COMMITTEE.

4. COMMENTS MADE ON SEPTEMBER 26 BY WIRA MUSIKAPHONG, SPOKESMAN OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND A MEMBER OF ITS "PROGRESSIVE" FACTION, INDICATE THE POSSIBILITY THAT OTHER PARTIES MIGHT STILL BE COALITION PARTNERS. HE TOLD THE PRESS THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND OTHER COALITION PARTNERS ON FOUR ISSUES HAVE TO BE IRONED OUT PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. THE ISSUES ARE THE APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE, THE RETURN OF THANOM, THE SHARING OF INVESTIGATIVE POWERS, AND THE DECLARATION OF ASSETS BY POLITICIANS AND HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

5. THE MURDER OF TWO ANTI-THANOM ACTIVISTS ON SEPTEMBER 24 HAS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION IN BANGKOK. STUDENT AND LABOR ACTIVISTS MET WITH M.R. SENI ON SEPTEMBER 26 AND URGED HIM TO INVESTIGATE THE MURDER FULLY AND ASKED HIM TO EXPEL THANOM FROM THAILAND AS AN URGENT MATTER, SINCE HIS PRESENCE WAS THE CAUSE OF THE MURDERS. M.R. SENI ON SEPTEMBER 24 HAD ALREADY ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF THE MURDERS TO DEPUTY POLICE CHIEF CHUMPHON LTG LOHACHALA. THE TWO ACTIVISTS, WHO HAD VOLUNTEERED TO PUT UP ANTI-THANOM POSTERS IN NAKHON PATHOM, HAD BEEN GARROTED AND WERE FOUND HANGING FROM THE GATES OF AN ABANDONED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MOTOR WORKSHOP. ANTI-THANOM ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN HARRASSED BY RIGHT-WING ELEMENTS RECENTLY.

6. THE NSCT-SPONSORED RALLY MENTIONED IN REFTEL WAS HELD ON SEPTEMBER 25 WITH NO UNTOWARD INCIDENT. ON LY 3 TO 5,000 ATTENDED THE RALLY, INDICATING THAT THE NSCT HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN ABLE TO GENERATE MUCH ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ANTI-THANOM CAMPAIGN THUS FAR, DESPITE AN EXTENSIVE POSTER AND DIRECT SOLICITATION CAMPAIGN.

7. COMMENT: M.R. SENI'S SUDDEN RESIGNATION DIVERTED PUBLIC ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE THANOM AFFAIR, BUT THE GRUESOME DEATH OF THE TWO ACTIVISTS HAS REFOCUSSED IT ON THANOM. THE DEATHS HAVE ALSO HELPED TO UNDERCUT SOMEWHAT PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR THANOM, ORIGINALLY GENERATED BY THE REASON FOR HIS RETURN (VISIT HIS AILING FATHER) AND HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE MONKHOOD. THE ARGUMENTS THAT THANOM IS USING RELIGION FOR SELFISH REASONS AND THAT HE IS PULLING THE MONARCHY INTO POLITICS HAVE ALSO COUNTERACTED SOMEWHAT EXISTING SYMPATHY FOR THANOM.

8. THE EMBASSY IS OF THE OPINION THAT THANOM WILL CONTINUE TO BE A PROBLEM UNLESS HE IS PERSUADED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. HE WILL NOT BE SO PERSUADED UNTIL PUBLIC PRESSURE IS SO GREAT THAT THE KING WILL BE OBLIGED TO ASK HIM TO LEAVE. THAT MAY ONLY BE AFTER OTHERS DEATHS OCCUR, CAUSED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY BY HIS PRESENCE HERE.

9. M.R. SENI WILL ALSO HAVE TO FACE UP TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS RESIGNATION--THE RESHUFFLE OF MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS AND A POSSIBLE INTERNAL FIGHT IN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY OVER THE PARTNERS IN THE FUTURE COALITION. STATEMENTS BY "PROGRESSIVE" DEMOCRATS SUGGEST THAT THE MAKEUP OF THE NEXT COALITION GOVERNMENT IS NOT AS SETTLED AS INDICATED BY M.R. SENI'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 24 THAT HE WOULD BE THE PRIME MINISTER IN A COALITION MADE UP OF THE SAME FOUR PARTIES.
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